

# Three Species-of the Albany River

By Gord Ellis

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The Albany River is one of Canada, s greatest, and most fish rich river systems. From its source at Lake St. Joseph , near Pickle Lake, to its entry into James Bay, the Albany is a great big fish factory. Despite its northern latitude, the Albany has big fish and lot of them. Pike, walleye and brook trout grow to trophy sizes here, and the average fish of all species is generally larger than many other lake systems in the north. Because the Albany is a river system, the lakes connected fish a but differently than your typical northern lake. Fishing the mighty river itself is a challenge, but one that can pay off in some of the most amazing angling in North America. Keying in on distinct types of structure and habitat will help an angler enormously. I,ve focused mostly on where and not so much how or with what in this piece. Check out my piece eon the Albany River tackle box for those details. Here are some of my thoughts on where to find the primary sport species of the Albany River watershed.

## Northern Pike

Northern pike are found through the Albany system, but thrive in the large pools within the river, and in the weedy bays and islands that dot the connecting lakes. The pike of the Albany River are tough customers, and the big ones have had to survive long winters under the ice, coupled with intense competition for food and habitat. Some of the largest pike I've caught in the Albany (fish in the mid 40 inch range) have been located near the spots that feature the best walleye fishing. The connection is an obvious one: lots of walleye equal lots of food for big pike. Monster pike pick off small and injured walleye as the school mills about. This is why whenever a good walleye bite stops in a hole, I reach for the pike gear. It,s amazing how often a big gator has rolled into the area, attracted by the chaos created when a lot of fish are being caught. Almost anybody who fishes the Albany watershed has a story about a huge pike grabbing a walleye they were reeling in. The fight is fun while it lasts, but generally the big pike lets go of its now chewed up quarry and disappears back into the depths. That is exciting stuff.

When it comes to locating pike, the season makes a difference. In late May to about mid June, the pike will likely be shallow and are often associated with the weedy bays they spawn in. If the bay or inlet has a river, you can be sure a few pike will be hanging around the mouth of the creek. Don,t be surprised if they are really shallow. Look for swirls or commotion up in the reeds. Sometimes you,ll hear the pike before you actually see them. In sandy bottom bays, you may actually be able to see fish lying on the bottom, motionless. A pair of good polarized sunglasses will do wonders when you are looking for pike. More often, the water will be stained and it will be difficult to see the fish. Just have faith that early in the season, the pike will be shallow. Be quiet in these bays, use a paddle to move into the hotspots if you can. Shallow pike are very spooky and will high tail it out of the bay if too much noise is made.

As the water warms, the big pike start to move deeper, or into current. I generally look for two main types of structure in July and August.

The most obvious choice for pike is large beds of cabbage weed, usually located not far from deep water. The average depth of these weed beds will be in the 8 to 14 foot range. The deeper the cabbage bed is, the more likely huge pike will be hanging around it. Look for the tops of deep weeds to be poking above the surface. Cabbage beds are often located in the deeper water off more obvious aquatic vegetation like reeds and lily pads. The second type of spot is wherever current carries food pass ambush spots. Two good choices are the tail outs of large pools, or where the current dumps into a large pool. Pike will sit flat on the bottom and wait for food to be swept pass them. If there is a bit of weed associated with this current, that is a plus.

In the fall, pike will start to move to main lake points, and wind swept reefs. Points with large weed beds adjacent to them will almost certainly hold big pike. Windy, sunny days with a prevailing west wind will get big pike very active. Don,t overlook wind swept rock reefs, ever. Big pike park on these spots between feeding forays in open water.

## **Walleye**

Walleye are the bread and butter fish of the Albany, and can be literally found everywhere in the system. I,ve caught Albany walleye above and below falls, in rapids, weeds, shallow and deep, on sand, over mud and even below sea plane docks. It,s amazing how much of the river and the connecting lakes these fish use.

In lakes, walleye act much like they do in other large northern reservoirs. In the spring, you can expect the fish to be gathered at the mouth of incoming stream and rivers, often in huge numbers. Those often rumoured 100 fish days are very possible if you find a post spawn/early summer concentration of walleye in current. There are also shoal and shore spawning concentrations of fish, which means you can troll just about any bay and pop some fish. As the water warms, the walleye will start to spread out to the drop offs and reefs. While fish will be found through out the lakes by summer, you can expect the current areas to remain good all season. Especially in the morning and evening, when walleye become the most active. Mid lake reefs and humps also hold good fish. Another great traditional walleye hot spot in the Albany watershed is any narrowing or neck down: this could be between an island, a couple reefs or the entrance into a bay. If the wind is blowing through this narrow or neck down, so much the better. Walleye love narrow areas as it helps reduce the search area they need to find minnows, perch and other small fish. On the Albany, if you can,t find fish, start trolling a diving crank bait and cover water It,s the rare walleye that will pass up a passing crank and you can often find a school of them this way.

Walleye in the main river are current oriented. But most of the time, the fish will not be found in direct current. They will be parked along the current seam, often in the quiet back water of a pool. They can also tuck in behind boulders, or sit belly to the bottom in the deeper pools. River walleye are very aggressive, and will follow a lure quite close to the boat. If you get out and fish from shore, don,t be surprised if a walleye swims right to shore chasing your lure. Really!

## Brook Trout

Unlike walleye, you won't find brookies everywhere you drop a line in the Albany system. In fact, they reside pretty much only in the river, its tributaries, and in very select places at that. In the spring and early summer, brook trout will be in the white water sections of the Albany, and will be tucked in behind rocks and boulders, or set up along shore. Brook trout are a very aggressive fish, and will come quite a way to chase a lure. However, the bigger a brookie gets, the more lazy it gets. That's why it pays to get your lure down near the bottom, where a big trout can grab it easily. Jigs work well in heavier current, as do fat bodied spoons. Brook trout in the Albany will often be found below steep rapids and small falls, but just as often they will be found above these sharp drops. The reason they like these spots is a bit of a mystery, but it seems to have something to do with faults in the rock. Fault lines - typical around falls areas - allow spring water to seep out, and cold upwelling water is what the brook trout seeks out when the water gets warm. As a rule, brook trout are uncomfortable in warm water, and prefer temperatures closer to 50 degrees than 60 F. This need for cold water will sometimes (but not always!) push the brookies out of the main river rapids by mid July, and into some of the tributaries. A couple of the better feeder brook trout rivers to the Albany are available via fly in from Miminiska Lodge. The tributaries are all rough and tumble rivers, and require wading and the use of a canoe, but that's how brook trout like it. Expect brookies in the small creeks to be in the head of deep pools, and in the runs between rapids. Fly fishermen can have a field day on both the Albany, and its tributaries when the caddis and mayflies are hatching. Splashes of feeding brook trout will be obvious, and trout take flies with abandon. As summer becomes fall, the trout will start to take on vivid spawning coloration. If there is a prettier fish than a brookie in its spawning dress, I've not seen it. Simply beautiful.

The Albany watershed is a special place, for both its great fishing and its natural beauty. One trip to this gorgeous part of Canada, and you will be hooked for life. Don't miss out.

*This and other articles prepared by Gord Ellis, are a free information service of Ontario Canada's Premier Outdoor Adventure Provider. Information about Fly In Fishing Adventures is available at [www.wildernessnorth.com](http://www.wildernessnorth.com) or 888-465-3474.*



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